

# A Farmer on the Middleman

**A** NYBODY knows, without stoppin' to think, that little things like sellin' a couple o' dozen pigs or a thousand bar'ls of apples ain't a bit like feedin' the stomach of New York or any other big town. Eatin' is a disease in the cities, an' I ain't so sure, senset everybody that ain't got any other business nowadays starts a restaurant, that vittles ain't a habit formin' thing.

It ain't on'y the people in the big cities that's got to be fed; it's the garbage pails. If Americans didn't throw away as much as they eat they'd think the last shadder of their widely advertised liberties was gone. Mister Hoover kinda pulled 'em up durin' the war, an' to hear the holler they made you'd 'a' thought a lot of 'em had their legs shot off. Every furriner that comes over here is paralyzed to see the way we waste vittles. What goes into the carts would fatten all the starvin' Chinamen an' Russians in the world.

If Hoover could git a law compellin' the clean plate all the time an' give all the grub it saved to the relief fund foreign exchange might 'a' got straightened out quicker, becuz you can't talk about brotherhood to a feller that ain't tasted beef for eight years. But for fillin' the pockets of those that makes money off of it, what's wasted is jest as good as what's eat. It's a matter of record that the farmer gits thirty-two cents gross receipts out of every dollar that's spent fer foodstuff, but the city man pays a hunderd, an' on what's wasted he loses twice.

My little deals in pigs an' apples wasn't a drop in the bucket, but they showed the truth of the doctrine, an' how possible it would be to cure the evils that is makin' marriage a extra hazardous occupation. I say "possible." It would be, if it wasn't fer jest one thing. I've showed ye how the thing worked, but when ye come to think of the mountains of vittles that's unloaded in a city, day in an' day out, an' realize that they's never more than two or three days' supply on hand, ye kin begin to git a faint idee of the job it's gonta be to unscramble the food system.

In a small, narrer minded way you talk about the middle man. Great Scott! The middle man ain't a person any more. He's a form of pernicious anemia; he's a atmosphere, a miasma, a epidemic. He's the avengin' angel an' the primal curse all rolled into one. Now that's what I'd call depersonalizin' a feller. Life is certainly gittin' kinda complicated.

As near as I kin figger it out, nothin' is worth anythin' till it gits to the machine. It's organization that tucks on the value, an' the feller that makes anything, or grows anything, or invents anything, ain't the feller that builds houses in Floridy off'n the proceeds. By the sweat of the other feller's brow shalt thou eat alligator pears an' smoke Uppman Imperials all the days of thy life. Thou canst produce butter or grain or garden truck all the days of thy life an' have thy wife patch thy pants with an ol' grain bag to keep them from scandalizin' the neighborhood.

Like most of the farmin' class, the Great Unorganized, I used to ship stuff down to New York on commission, an' I got what I got. One August I sent down a lot o' fine Clapp pears, an' in a few days I got back a postal card—price one cent—sayin' they sold fer \$2.75. Less freight, cartage an' commissions, they fetched home \$1.46, an' of course netted me a loss.

A day or two afterward I was in New York an' I wandered down in the produce section an' looked up the place I sent 'em to. There out in front sets some o' my bar'ls—jest as pretty lookin' Clapps as you wanta see—an there, settin' out under his wooden awnin', fer it was a hot day, was the feller I'd shipped 'em to. While I was rubberin' at the pears he come an' as't me if I was lookin' to buy some.

"No," I says; "I very seldom eat 'em. I was just lookin' at 'em becuz they was so nice; but you have a lot o' spillage 'n' loss in this 'ere business, I guess."

That started him a goin'. "You betcha," he says, 'n' begun to tell me his troubles.

He'd found a sympathetic stranger, I don't think.

"My," he groans, "how this 'ere stuff costs, an' they try to git it away from ye fer nothin'."

"They do, too," I says. "If it's a fair question, what do ye git fer a bar'l o' them there?"

"I don't part with a bar'l o' them pears fer less 'n \$6 to nobody," he says. "Don't ye think that's cheap enough?"

"I sure do," I says; "I didn't have no idea ye sold 'em fer no such price as that."

"Well, we do," he says.

"Fine," I says; "you never was in jail, was ye?"

"Not yit," he says, laughin'.

"Well, ye'd oughta be," says I, pullin' out his postal card. "Mister, I'm Josh Bean from Bascom's Bridge," I says, "an' there's my name on them bar'ls. I'm the sucker that grewed them pears an' that got back a dollar'n'forty-six cents fer 'em."

He took the card 'n' looked at it. Blimey he took the cigar out of his mouth an' grinned the hull width of his face.

"That's right," he says; "you be a sucker. Why, don't ye quit it 'n' git into some business where ye kin make some money?"

I was so mad I could 'a' pasted him in the nose, but he was big enough t' eat hay, an' just then two men that was workin' fer him come out 'n' leaned up agin me. One had a bar'l hatchet 'n' th' other had

a nail puller. I ain't any fool. I decided it was about milkin' time.

"Some time," I says to him, "folks is gonta git wise to you burglars an' sting ye to death."

He jest laughed an' says, "Gwan," an' I did. That afternoon I near got run over by a big automobile that was racin' up Fifth avenue, an' darn me if that feller wasn't settin' inside.

"By Godfrey," I says to myself, "there goes my Clapp's Favorites."

But that afternoon I'd put in the time goin' round from one store an' fruit stand to another—wherever I seen Clapp pears—

*Continued on Page Twenty.*

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